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EDUCATING INNER CITY CHILDREN: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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American education's most challenging problem in the latter half of the 20th century is indisputably in the large cities. Achievement test scores show that children in the central cities lag consistently behind the average in educational attainment. The concern over elimination and unification of small, rural, inefficient school districts has now been overshadowed by the controversy over the organization and administration of large metropolitan school districts such as New York, Washington, D.C., Chicago, and Los Angeles. Questions about quality of instructional programs and adequate educational expenditures are being raised as much in the cities with their large industrial tax base as in the poor communities of the South.

The so-called crisis in urban education appears to have materialized in the last few years, contemporaneously with our concern over civil rights and poverty. In effect, the crisis is in the center of our urban areas, in the ghettos populated by the poor and the minority groups. But the fact that children of minority groups and/or low-income families do not do as well in school as middle-class Caucasian children is not a new problem nor a sudden discovery.

Educators have long known that there is a strong correlation between a student's educational achievement and his socio-economic background. Statistics in California show that the child from a disadvantaged background has traditionally achieved at the rate of .7 of a year for every year of instruction. This means that the disadvantaged child falls further and further behind, at the rate of three months for every school year. Thus, at the end of the third grade, he is already a full year behind

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the middle-class student and when he enters his teenage years, he is two years behind, and about to become a statistic—a dropout.

We have traditionally thought of a dropout in terms of the child's failure to succeed in school. But a more realistic appraisal is that dropouts reflect the school's failure to succeed with the child. In effect, the child has not dropped out; he has been pushed out by a school that has ignored his educational needs and by a school program that had no relevance to his aspirations or learning problems.

Although most of our children come from lower-class families, our schools have been geared to the middle-class child. Our teachers come from middle-class backgrounds and naturally are better able to understand and communicate with the middle-class child. Our curriculum, textbooks and recognized teaching methods are all aimed at the experiences and values of the middle-class child.

But the instructional program that is good for the middle-class child is not necessarily good for the child whose background is one of poverty. The child of poverty has not had many of the simple experiences which we assume are common with all youngsters. He has not been taught at home to place a high value on education, to think of education as the key to success. Instead of being prepared for school with a home full of books, magazines, and newspapers, his childhood is one of illness, hunger and threat of eviction. Because of the low status that society has accorded him and his family, he is likely to have a low image of himself and a lack of motivation to succeed, at least to attain what is considered success in middle-class terms. The most severe handicap is his lack of verbal communication skills that are foundations of reading and writing. He may not speak English at all, or if he does, it comes out in monosyllables and incomplete sentences.

This child is behind from the day he enters school. Failures pile upon failures until the child simply gives up.

The problem is not new. What is new is the attention that is finally being given to the problem. Most of the students who are dropping out today would never have attended high school at all 50 years ago. They would have quit school before reaching the secondary level and would have taken unskilled jobs which were then readily available. They would not have been considered dropouts, they would have simply joined the working class.

What is new is that a majority of Americans are now living in metropolitan areas, and among the "immigrants" are large proportions of persons from minority groups and low-income families. In effect, the educational problems which have always been with us are becoming more concentrated in certain parts of our large cities and are thus becoming more visible. Recent statistics published by the Bureau of the Census and the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that 69 percent of

the Negroes and 64 percent of the whites now live in the cities or urban fringe areas. Negroes now constitute 25 percent of the residents of cities with more than one million population, and in some cities they are a majority.

And most significantly, what is new is that the poor and the alienated are no longer willing to accept the status quo. They are demanding what any middle-class parent would have demanded long ago if his child did not seem to be getting anything out of the educational system. They are demanding an accounting and a change in the system to make it more relevant to their needs.

COMPENSATORY EDUCATION

Compensatory education is based on the premise that the disadvantaged child *can* succeed if he is given the assistance and the adequate educational program that will enable him to maximize his potential. It is also based on a new concept of what is meant by the term equal educational opportunity.

Traditionally, educators and the public have spoken of equal educational opportunity in terms of sameness—the same textbooks, the same curriculum, the same class size, the same number of library volumes for all children. If every child received the same treatment, then every child was receiving an equal educational opportunity.

Compensatory education rejects this concept and recognizes that equal educational opportunity means an educational program geared to the needs of each individual child. This means that more money, more books, more individual attention through smaller class size, more curriculum experimentation and better teachers must be poured into the schools where economically and environmentally disadvantaged children are concentrated.

However, merely providing more money alone will not do the job, if that money is spent to provide more of the same program that has failed in the past. We cannot make a significant difference in the educational attainment of the urban disadvantaged by just patching up our normal school procedures with a few remedial band-aids. Too often, educators and the public tend to look for the easy solution, and in the case of the disadvantaged, the easy answer is to provide more money to reduce class size.

One of the most highly publicized programs for urban ghettos has been the "More Effective Schools" program in New York City. This effort consists of a substantial reduction in teacher load, along with an increase in supplementary personnel such as clerical help, counselors, and administrators. A recent evaluation by the Center for Urban Studies disclosed that while the program had definitely improved the morale

and attitudes of the school staff, students, and community, it has not had a lasting effect in significantly increasing student achievement. One of the prime reasons, according to the evaluators, was that the teachers continued using the same curriculum and teaching techniques with 20 students that they used with 40. Our evaluation report of California compensatory education programs supports the finding that merely reducing class size alone will not do the job. An effective compensatory education program must change the *substance* as well as the *form* of the instructional program.

The California evaluation report, which was based on the first full year of operation of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I, projects in 1966-67, showed that the best gains in achievement occurred where a comprehensive program involving multiple activities was provided for the students. Piecemeal projects which attempted through a single activity to overcome the learning handicaps caused by poverty usually failed to result in demonstrable achievement gains.

Where a comprehensive program was provided, the average growth was more than one month per month of instruction, or more than one year per year of instruction, as compared to the participants' previous average for .7 year growth per year of instruction. This does not mean that the children in compensatory education caught up after one year. What it does mean is that they stopped falling further behind and the gap between them and the middle-class child decreased rather than increased as it normally would have.

The successful programs included a careful diagnosis of each individual student's learning difficulties. A comprehensive program that would attack that particular student's problems was then provided. The focus was on finding methods or techniques that would be successful with each student, rather than applying a blanket instructional program for all students.

What makes up a comprehensive compensatory education program depends on the needs of the students. Most of the programs in California center on changes in curriculum, especially in reading and language development. Supportive activities often include counseling and guidance, health and nutritional services, cultural enrichment, library expansion, after school study centers, preschool, inservice training of staff personnel and activities to improve school-home relationships.

Because of limited funds, a dilemma often arises as to whether to provide a concentrated program for a limited number of students or a limited program for all the students who may need compensatory education. When compensatory education funds became available in California, the large cities—and many smaller communities—faced the problem that the funds were insufficient to enable all the eligible students to participate. Without hesitation, we adopted the policy of

doing an adequate job with a limited number of students rather than scattering bits and pieces among all the children, which would not have made a significant impact on any of the children.

Also essential is coordination and articulation between grades and grade levels to insure that achievement gains are lasting and not merely dramatic, short-term improvements. The story of what happened with Head Start and other preschool programs has been well-documented throughout the nation. Too many people were looking for a miracle and thought that if disadvantaged children were exposed to a few months of intensive classroom experience, all our educational problems in the ghettos would be solved. What resulted was that Head Start "graduates" proceeded to lose their gains when they were placed in regular kindergarten and primary grade classrooms that were not prepared to build upon the children's preschool experience.

Compensatory education activities, to be of maximum effectiveness, must start at an early age and continue until the student is able to maintain progress without extra help. The California findings show that greatest gains in compensatory education programs are achieved by students in the elementary grades, with least gains demonstrated at the high school level.

California guidelines for compensatory education provide that school districts place priority on elementary school students, so that the elementary schools are saturated before attempts are made to reach the secondary population. Within the elementary school level, school districts are to serve only the number of schools and children for which a comprehensive program—amounting to at least \$300 over and above the regular school program—can be implemented.

This, of course, means that many eligible children are left out. But the solution to this is to provide an adequate funding level, rather than attempt to serve all the eligible children with less than half the funds.

DISADVANTAGED OR MENTALLY RETARDED?

This paper will not attempt to go into depth in the complex issue of the relationship between environmental deprivation and mental retardation. However, I would like to offer a few comments on this topic.

Those who work in compensatory education as well as those who work in special education programs for the mentally retarded must give attention to the possible misclassification of children from poverty areas. California's annual survey of the racial and ethnic backgrounds of students in public school programs shows that the percentage of minority group children enrolled in special education classes is substantially higher than that of the majority group. The rate of placement of Spanish surname children in special education is about three times higher than

for Anglo children; the Negro rate is close to four times higher than the Anglo rate. Children from all minority groups constitute about one-fourth of the public school enrollment in the state, but about half the special education enrollment.

To some extent, a higher rate of mental retardation in poverty areas may be due to the organic damage resulting from lack of adequate health care, dietary deficiencies, etc. But the question must be raised: to what extent are children classified as mentally retarded when the true nature of their learning disabilities stems from environmental factors? In California, educators are taking a second look at their classification criteria to see if language difficulties, deprivation of experiences, and deviation from the majority's culture and value system may be entering into the determination of who is mentally retarded.

Several school districts have developed programs whereby children identified as borderline mentally retarded are reclassified for compensatory education programs rather than classes for the mentally retarded. The children are provided intensive language development and enrichment activities to enable them to function in regular classroom activities.

There are also several such projects for children of preschool age. In one project, for example, half of the children who were thought to be mentally retarded were recommended for placement in regular kindergarten classes after participation in compensatory preschool programs.

INTEGRATION

Two recent national reports—one by the U.S. Civil Rights Commission and another by the U.S. Office of Education—show that most children in the United States, and especially in our urban centers, attend schools that are segregated, that is, where almost all of their fellow students are of the same racial background as they are.

The Civil Rights Commission's report, "Racial Isolation in the Public Schools," states that in a survey of 75 cities, 75 percent of the Negro students in the elementary grades attend schools that are at least 90 percent Negro, while 83 percent of the white students are in nearly all-white schools. Population trends indicate that the degree of segregation in the nation's schools is increasing and not decreasing. Eighty-four percent of the total Negro enrollment increase in a survey of Northern city school systems was absorbed in schools that are at least 90 percent Negro, and 97 percent of the students were enrolled in schools that were more than 50 percent Negro.

In the last few years, there has been much discussion in educational circles as to the best method of improving the education of disadvantaged minority group students. There are some who say, "Let's forget about

integration. It's too hard to accomplish. We'll pour extra resources into our ghetto schools and do the job through compensatory education." And then there are those who say, "Let's forget about compensatory education. Just desegregate the schools and the problems of low achievement among minority groups will vanish."

This schism exists among leaders of minority groups as well as among school administrators. Among civil rights groups, there are leaders who feel that compensatory education is just an excuse for maintaining segregation. And lately, there are Negro leaders, including those who a few years ago were in the forefront of the integration battle, who now are urging that we accept the fact of segregation and concentrate on building the "golden ghetto" school.

The answer is not *either* compensatory education *or* integration. The two are not mutually exclusive. It is not an either/or situation, and neither can substitute for the other. Both compensatory education and integration are needed to reach the goal of maximizing educational opportunities for minority group youth.

The U.S. Office of Education's Study, "Equality of Educational Opportunity," commonly known as the Coleman report, points out that a student's achievement is strongly related to the educational backgrounds and aspirations of the other students in the school. Segregation of students from the same racial and economic background works to the disadvantage of those children whose family educational resources are meager. Such segregation deprives these children of the learning environment that is engendered by more advantaged students with their higher motivation, better verbal skills and vocabulary and higher achievement level.

For the minority child, the segregated school reinforces the attitudes and practices of the dominant society that have placed him in a subordinate position. Every day that the minority child enters his classroom and sees a sea of faces all of the same color, he is reminded that society considers him not equal enough to join it. The psychological effects of segregation on the student's learning cannot be erased by compensatory education alone.

But just as compensatory education is not a substitute for integration, neither can integration be a substitute for compensatory education. Just moving the bodies around will not insure that the deprivations resulting from poverty will somehow disappear into thin air. Many persons have interpreted the Coleman report to mean that integration alone will lead to increased student achievement. The author of the report, Professor James Coleman of Johns Hopkins University, has refuted this interpretation of his study.

In California, several city school districts have developed programs that involve both compensatory education and integration for disad-

vantaged minority group students. State guidelines for the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Title I, programs provide that funds may be used to plan and implement integration, with compensatory education services following the children to their new schools. In this way, the enrichment and special services that children from poverty backgrounds need will be available in the integrated schools to facilitate their learning process. In Sacramento, for example, compensatory education funds are used to pay for transporting 1,000 Negro elementary school students to predominantly Caucasian schools. Remedial reading teachers, counselors, and a free lunch program have been added to the receiving schools.

The racially segregated school not only jeopardizes the minority child's potential for high academic achievement, but it fosters, among both minority and majority children, damaging attitudes and distorted behavior that have perpetuated isolation in all aspects of American life.

The U.S. Civil Rights Commission report cited statistics of a national survey of Caucasian and Negro adults on the relationship between the racial makeup of the schools they attended and their attitudes toward the other race. This survey indicated that Caucasians who attended desegregated schools expressed greater willingness to reside in an interracial neighborhood, to have their children attend integrated schools, to have Negro friends, and to support the elimination of discrimination in employment against Negroes. Similarly, Negroes who had attended schools where the majority of the students were Caucasians were more likely to have children in desegregated schools and were more willing to send their children out of the neighborhood, if necessary, to obtain the benefits of integrated education. And, regardless of their educational background or region of the country, Negroes with integrated school backgrounds were more likely to disagree with the statement, "If a Negro is wise he will think twice before he trusts the white man as much as he would another Negro."

Thus, aside from its effects on school achievement, integration of our schools is important if American society is to become truly multiracial. We must be just as concerned about the Caucasian student who is growing up in an isolated school environment as we are about the minority group child. An educational system which helps perpetuate the feelings of unrealistic superiority and racial prejudice of the majority group is not a quality educational system and is not preparing its students to live in a heterogeneous society, regardless of the number of students it sends on to college.

To be realistic, it is not possible to integrate Watts of Los Angeles or the South Side of Chicago overnight or even in the near future. However, the massive size of the segregation problem or the difficulties, both financially and logistically, of implementing racial balance in the class-

room should not be used as an excuse to stand still and fail to make any efforts toward providing our urban students with some form of integrated educational experiences. Such situations demand not less effort, but more creativity.

The area of extracurricular activities, for example, provides great opportunities for students from different parts of the cities and different racial and economic backgrounds to participate in integrated programs. Student government, debate, athletics, music, and drama lend themselves to interschool and interschool district participation and not merely as competitors. A city-wide or regional choir or orchestra would enable an integrated group of students to work together toward a common goal. Minority groups students could be exposed to life outside their neighborhood through field trips to cultural performances, city council meetings, and industrial firms.

If a city is unable to integrate its schools, it can at least prevent the problem from getting worse by stabilizing the transition areas. Special efforts must be made to insure that schools which are integrated now do not become predominantly minority group schools in the future. This requires that careful attention be given to the racial makeup of the integrated school and boundary changes adjusted when necessary to insure its heterogeneous composition. It also requires intensive efforts to maintain the quality of the educational program in that school and to make it a model institution where any parent would wish to send his son or daughter.

ADMINISTRATION OF THE URBAN SCHOOL SYSTEM

In the California evaluation report on compensatory education, we found that the greatest improvement in achievement was demonstrated by students in the medium-sized urban districts. These students did far better than did their counterparts in the state's largest cities. The U.S. Office of Education reports that similar findings are being reported from other states.

One reason is that the degree of educational deprivation and retardation is less severe in the medium-sized cities than in the largest cities. But another possible reason is that the administrative framework of large city school systems may be less flexible and less easily mobilized for change. The cumbersome bureaucracies that exist in many city educational structures often mean delay in implementing new programs.

However, the solution lies in making the large city administrative structure more flexible and more receptive to innovation, not in breaking it up completely. The proposals to create many small "community" school districts in a large city would eliminate the advantages as well as the disadvantages of size.

Real control comes with the purse strings—including the power to levy taxes and allocate resources. Most decentralization proposals retain this power in the central school board, which would determine how much each community district would receive although the community board can determine the spending of its own share.

In effect, what these proposals would do is to say to the community, "If you don't like the way we're running the schools, you try to do better." At the same time that the new system deprives the local community of the alibi that "they" are not educating "our children," it gives the central school board an alibi for its failures. There is a great danger that the ghettos will be locked in perpetual segregation and will find themselves at a disadvantage in competing with more attractively located community districts for the best personnel.

Large city school systems must become more responsive to the views of the community and involve parents in the decision-making processes, but this does not require turning over administration of the schools to a community which does not have the same expertise and resources that the central city administration can gather together. A large system can be sensitive to needs of its sub-parts without making each sub-part a separate organization. It is significant that the impetus for decentralizing city school systems has come largely from the demands of low-income communities for a larger voice in educational affairs rather than from the middle-income and high-income communities. This is because our school systems have always been able to be responsive to the concerns of the more affluent parents and it was not necessary to turn over the schools to these parents in the process.

Crucial to the success of a city school system in meeting the concerns of disadvantaged communities is a change in personnel policy and practice. It is common practice in many school districts for the inexperienced teachers and administrators to be placed in the ghetto area schools. Then, if they survive a few years, they are promoted "up the hill." Often this is not due to design, but to a seniority system where the experienced teachers are given their choice of assignment, leaving the younger teachers with no choice but to take what is left—what is usually the "difficult" schools. In the case of school principals, a common practice is to move them around the school district to different schools as training prior to promotion to the front office.

If we are to solve the educational problems of our ghettos, we cannot leave the selection of principals and teachers in those areas up to chance. We must recognize that not all principals and teachers, even good ones, have the temperament and skills to work effectively with children from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds. School personnel must be assigned on the basis of their ability to function in a specific situation.

Once the staff has been carefully placed in a school, it must be pro-

vided sufficient resources and flexibility to exert leadership and creativity. The principal must be able to make decisions and experiment with new ideas without going through a tortuous bureaucratic maze. It is possible to have decentralization within the large city school system. It is possible for the building principal to be as responsive to the needs of his immediate community and the wishes of parents as the suburban school principal is to his community if the principal is able to act without first checking upstairs.

Of course, there must be minimum standards and policies for conduct and procedures within the administrative structure. However, standardization—the old nemesis of the same program for every child—must not be allowed to take precedence over flexibility to meet the needs of diverse communities and student populations within a large city school system.

The future of the urban school system will be determined by its ability to make the necessary changes without breaking down—or being torn apart. What is at stake is not just the city school system—but public education itself. For education's most challenging problem in the latter half of the 20th Century is in the large cities. And, if public education cannot rise to its greatest challenge, it will be questionable whether public education is worth saving.